

COMMENTARY

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The contribution by Scarlett O'Phelan is of particular interest for demonstrating, on the basis of solid sources, the effects of the Bourbon reforms "from below." In contrast to much of the literature on the Caroline reforms in which theoretical – juridical questions are excessively dominant, O'Phelan presents us with a material – social study. Of course the author's chosen geographical focus permits only in part generalizations concerning the whole of Spanish America during the so-called reform era.

The author convincingly documents the quantitative and qualitative changes of fiscal policy, the key element of the whole reform project. It becomes clear that the major categories of the population – creoles, mestizos and Indians – were affected by the altered system of taxation, and by which mechanisms this occurred. As a consequence the possibilities of a general opposition against the Spanish policies and its dedicated representatives were enhanced. The connection drawn by O'Phelan between reform policy and revolutionary crisis (1780) must be viewed as conclusive.

The results and interpretations of the study invite further discussion and give rise to the following lines of thought:

1. As close as the connection between reforms – especially the new fiscal policies – and the revolutionary movements of 1780 may have been, the other factors which triggered and gave it its peculiar imprint, must not be neglected. Otherwise the impression may arise that the great crisis commencing in 1780 was a mere tax rebellion of which, as is well known, there were many during the colonial period – just as in the history of feudalism in general. Such a perspective would constitute an underestimation of the complexity and programmatic breadth of the movement since 1780, of its new historical quality – precisely transcending tax protests – as an integral part of the pre-independence process. The connection between the economic and political spheres in reality was considerably more complex.

* Translated from German by Nils Jacobsen

2. Creoles, mestizos and Indians admittedly were all affected by the new fiscal policy, albeit in rather different ways, something which the author has not stressed sufficiently. Also on this point a differentiated approach is necessary, in order to comprehend the distinct behavior of the mentioned groups (classes, strata) during the critical years of 1780 – 1781 and especially thereafter.

3. Besides the growing delimitation between Bajo and Alto Peru, clearly perceived by the author, a delimitation whose proto – national potential might well be worth a study of its own, there arises the question of an intra – regional (localistic) differentiation concerning the application and consequences of the new fiscal policies. For the type of dissolution later experienced by the "uniform" colonial system, the dialectical relationship between intra – and inter – regional diversification requires detailed analysis.

4. Only in passing does the author mention the significant consequences of the new fiscal policies for the process of accumulation. Because of the well known close connection between primitive accumulation and the genesis of capitalism, more attention should be dedicated to this problem, in order to come to grips with the double deformation of the process of accumulation in the Iberian world: on the one hand concerning the volume and quality of accumulation directed "to the outside" (from the colony to the metropolis), for which a comparison to the analogous studies of Enrique Semo on New Spain would be worthwhile; on the other hand concerning the primarily feudal (and not capitalist) utilization of the products of the accumulation process in the metropolis, or its immediate or indirect drainage to the other European centers of accumulation. These are, after all, decisive defining points for the later socioeconomic character of the independent regimes. What was articulated, at the surface, as resistance motivated by traditionalism and insistence on entrenched rights, ultimately had its substance in fundamental economic conflicts of interests.

The results of John TePaske's study on the development of revenue collection in the *cajas* of Mexico and Lima reaffirms the well known picture about the general economic tendencies of development during the period of the Caroline reform policies and the open crisis of the traditional colonial system. This study documents the continuing dominance of mining inspite of the general upswing in agriculture, something already affirmed by numerous contemporary authors (e.g. Humboldt). Peru's capacity to compensate for the loss of Upper Peru that occurred with the

foundation of the viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata, seems quite remarkable. It serves note on us, not to underestimate the degree of flexibility of colonial economies.

What makes such a study problematic, is that an augmented inflow of revenue does not constitute immediate proof for a comparable economic upswing. For the Mexican case the author himself relativized the results by attempting to juxtapose the nominal and deflated real revenue income. Analogous data for Peru unfortunately are not available, a fact which made it impossible to fully accomplish the interesting comparison. One would also have to investigate the problem to which degree the greater efficiency of fiscal policies lead to higher collections of the treasury without necessarily implying a proportionally equivalent economic development. The paper by Scarlett O'Phelan offers interesting clues for this discrepancy, which, of course, cannot be measured with precision. As a partial correction one would need to add the "illegal quota" (contraband trade, tax evasion and similar activities).

The author's attempt to calculate the per-capita tax rate for Mexico appears less compelling: On the one hand, the available statistics on population are too imprecise. On the other hand, the very measure of a tax rate for a colonial feudal economy must be questioned for the following two reasons: 1. the extreme polarization between a minority of property owners and the large majority of non-proprietors; and 2. the great significance of a non-integrated subsistence economy, which often is not even registered through tribute collection.

Beyond the detailed calculations of revenue quantities, there is the problem of the functional utilization of the accumulated sums (for productive ends or for the quasi-feudal formation of treasure). As is well known, the late colonial period was characterized by an acute shortage of capital in the mining sector as a consequence of an insufficient credit system. From the deformation of the process of accumulation (both towards the exterior and the interior) follows the further problem, that figures on quantitative growth need not necessarily constitute an index for qualitative changes in the structure of production (and, by extension, in the social structure). One may deduce as a working hypothesis, that from this there arose rather important consequences for the nature of the future independent societies. The quantitative economic growth had the potential to deepen the conflict of interests between colony and metropolis, since the discrepancy of economic power and political subordination experienced by the creole aristocracy (large landholders, local notables) was becoming more acute. Colonial economic

growth did not, however, imply a corresponding gain in bourgeois (capitalist) substance. In this way a deficit of social hegemony – relative to other revolutionary processes of the epoch – was preprogrammed.

The question concerning the cyclical nature of economic development (cycle understood as periodicity), which TePaske raises in connection with various methodological approaches and interpretations found in the literature, can, I believe, be answered negatively. Rather it is the element of steady progression without qualitative leaps which is dominant, combined with partial, regionally differentiated recessions. In this the complicated influence of exogenous factors would require precise analysis.

Also the difference between the various "core areas," which without doubt contributed the lion's share of revenue, and the less important, but at the same time more dynamic "periphery," should not escape our attention.

Finally, concerning the revenues of Lima (and their partial flow to Spain), the question still requires detailed analysis what the consequences (at least temporarily) of the profound crisis of 1780–81 might have been.